

REMARKS

Applicants respectfully request reconsideration of this Patent Application, particularly in view of the above Amendment and the following remarks. No additional fee is required for this Amendment as the number of independent claims has not changed, and the total number of claims has not changed.

Request for Telephone Interview

Applicants kindly request the Examiner to contact the undersigned at (847) 490-1400 to schedule a telephone interview, to discuss the merits of this Patent Application.

Amendment to the Claims

Applicants amended Claim 1 to clarify the claimed invention as requested by the Examiner. Applicants amended Claims 9-11 and 13 for consistency, as suggested by the Examiner. No new matter has been added to the claims by this Amendment.

Information Disclosure Statement

The Information Disclosure Statement (IDS) submitted on 05 December 2003 contained a typographical error in the patent number for the Hamajima et al. Patent. The Hamajima et al. Patent is Patent No. 6,326,525, as reported in the Third IDS submitted on 23 October 2002, in the parent application. Pursuant to MPEP 609(i)(A)(2), Applicants understand that this reference will be considered by the Examiner without any additional IDS or any fee.

Claim Rejections - 35 U.S.C. §112

The rejection of Claims 1-24 under 35 U.S.C. §112, for the reasons set forth at page 2 of the Office Action, is respectfully traversed.

Applicants amended Claim 1, and in view of the definition of the term “activated” provided at page 17, last paragraph, of Applicants’ Specification, Applicants respectfully assert amended Claim 1 is not indefinite.

Applicants amended Claims 9-11 and 13 as suggested by the Examiner, thereby rendering the rejection of these claims moot.

Applicants believe that the above Amendment and comments overcome the rejection of Claims 1-24.

Claim Rejections - 35 U.S.C. §103

The rejection of Claims 1-3, 6, 7, and 9-27 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Pike et al., EP 0665315, in view of Alper et al., U.S. Patent 6,024,822, is respectfully traversed.

Generally stated, Applicants’ claimed invention relates to forming a molded cellulosic fiber web through the application of radiofrequency energy and deforming the web on a molding surface. The cellulose fiber web includes a binder material. The molded cellulose fiber web retains the molded shape by activating the binder material with the radiofrequency energy before or during molding, and subsequently cooling the molded web.

Pike et al. discloses a thermoformed article formed of a web of synthetic thermoplastic fibers (non-cellulosic and nonabsorbent) and a heat-activatable adhesive component (Page 3, lines 7-51). The adhesive component can be in the form of an external liquid or powder hot-melt adhesive applied to the web or be included as a

component of the polymer fibers (Page 3, line 52 - page 4, line 6). The web is heated to melt the adhesive component, and the web is shaped on a mold (Abstract).

The Office Action says that Pike et al. teaches a method of preparing an absorbent article by providing an “absorbent web” (Page 3). The Office Action further notes that Pike et al. does not disclose using absorbent cellulosic fibers, applying radiofrequency energy to activate a binder, and disposing the web between a backsheet and a topsheet, as in Applicants’ claimed invention. Alper et al. is cited for teaching using microwave sensitive adhesives to form unmolded cellulose absorbent cores between a topsheet and backsheet. The Office Action alleges it would have been obvious to use the microwave sensitive binder material of Alper et al. as the binder in Pike et al.

Combining the teachings of Alper et al. and Pike et al. to use the microwave-sensitive adhesive material of Alper et al. as the binder in Pike et al. does not provide or suggest Applicants’ claimed invention. Pike et al. relates to synthetic, *nonabsorbent* thermoplastic polymer fiber webs, and there is no suggestion or motivation in Pike et al. (alone or in combination with Alper et al.) that the described process can be, or why it should be, used to impart a three-dimensional shape to absorbent cellulosic fiber webs. Thermoplastic polymer fibers are generally hydrophobic, and do not absorb fluids and swell like cellulosic fibers. As they do not absorb fluids, thermoplastic polymer fibers are not typically used as a principal fiber in absorbent layers of an absorbent article.

The Office Action is incorrect in calling the synthetic web of Pike et al. an “absorbent web.” Pike et al. discloses thermoforming a synthetic web to form resiliently compressible, cloth-like article. (Abstract; Page 2, lines 27-29; Page 3, lines 7-10). Such cloth-like articles are typically used as hydrophobic body liners in

personal care absorbent articles, such as sanitary napkins, and not as absorbent materials for absorbent core layers. One skilled in the art would not understand Pike et al. to be disclosing or suggesting forming an absorbent web. Applicants respectfully assert that one skilled in the art of absorbent materials and layers for absorbent articles would not be directed or motivated by the cited references to apply the process described in Pike et al. to an airlaid cellulosic fiber web to obtain a molded airlaid cellulosic web, as in Applicants' claimed invention.

As there is no suggestion or motivation in either Pike et al. or Alper et al. to deform absorbent cellulosic fiber webs to form a three-dimensional shape, Applicants assert that the Examiner has not established that Applicants' claimed invention is obvious over the cited prior art references, alone or in combination. Reconsideration and withdrawal of this rejection are respectfully requested.

The rejection of Claims 4, 5, and 8 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Pike et al., EP 0665315, in view of Alper et al., U.S. Patent 6,024,822, and further in view of Scott, Jr. et al., U.S. Patent Publication 2002/0032421, is respectfully traversed. Claims 4, 5, and 8 depend from amended Claim 1, and are patentable for at least the same reasons discussed above. Scott, Jr. et al. also does not disclose or suggest deforming absorbent cellulosic fiber webs to form a three-dimensional shape.

Conclusion

Applicants intend to be fully responsive to the outstanding Office Action. If the Examiner detects any issue which the Examiner believes Applicants

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have not resolved in this response, Applicants' undersigned attorney requests a telephone interview with the Examiner.

Applicants sincerely believe that this Patent Application is now in condition for allowance and, thus, respectfully requests early allowance.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Swanson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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